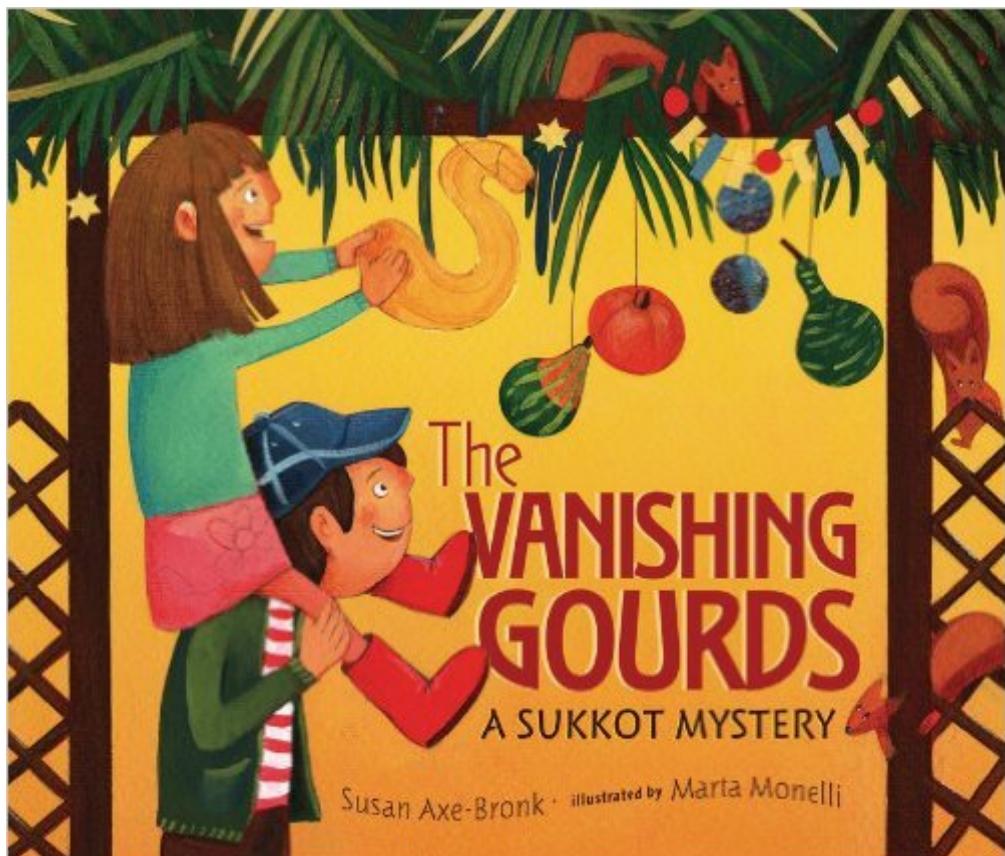


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# The Vanishing Gourds: A Sukkot Mystery



## **Synopsis**

When Saras gourds-- decorations for the family sukkah start mysteriously disappearing, the hunt is on for the culprits. The family of squirrels who are to blame pay the family back for the missing gourds in a surprising way.

## **Book Information**

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Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 starsÂ  See all reviewsÂ  (16 customer reviews)

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Age Range: 5 - 8 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 3

## **Customer Reviews**

It was autumn and Sara smiled and threw her arms up in the air as she jumped in a pile of multi-colored leaves. The squirrels loved the season too as they hurriedly gathered acorns and scampered up a nearby tree to hide them in a hole. Sara's mother asked if she wanted to go to the farm for it was a special time of year and they needed to gather up some gourds to "decorate the sukkah." Sara just loved everything about Sukkot, her favorite holiday. She slung her little tool kit over her shoulder when it was time to help her father as they built the sukkah and she was quick to stir up the pumpkin pie mix in the kitchen when it was time to bake. No doubt, Sara's favorite thing to do was help to "decorate the sukkah with colorful gourds they bought each year." Her brother, Avi, would proudly carry the box of Sukkot decorations when it was time to decorate and Sara would carry the gourds. Even their orange kitty cat loved to join in the fun, but first they must select the new gourds at the farm. The petting zoo was fun, but not quite as much fun as taking a look at the "many colors and shapes and sizes" of those gourds. Sara and her mother selected seven, including one that was S-shaped. At home Avi hoisted her on his shoulders to hang them. Oooh,

oooh! The sukkah roof was beautiful, but all of a sudden the gourds began to disappear one by one. What possibly could be happening to them? This is a charming, simple Sukkot mystery that young children will love to "solve." Even the youngest of children can enjoy decorating the sukkah and Sara's infectious excitement over her part will encourage other little ones to help and take delight in the process. Of course when her special gourds start to disappear, your young reader is sure to know just where they are going. The delightful twist at the end gives this story just the right amount of zing to bring a smile to anyone's face. The colorful, animated artwork elicits the special nature of Sukkot. This little mystery about vanishing gourds is the perfect way to introduce young children to the sukkah and Sukkot! This book courtesy of the publishers.

Jewish children find pleasure in celebrating Sukkot. Sara, the main character, exhibits absolute joy when she celebrates one of her favorite Jewish holidays. Interacting with nature is part of any outdoor adventure. Sara learns first-hand that the harvest vegetables that decorate her sukkah are desired by a neighborhood squirrel. A hungry squirrel smashes the gourds. Math skills will be reinforced as the number of gourds is reduced. Sara recognizes the squirrel's needs. As a result, she leaves food for him. The seeds from the gourds ultimately germinate in time for the next festival. Intertwining nature and basic math skills into this story makes the story very appealing to a secular young audience.

The Vanishing Gourd, written by Susan Axe-Bronk and illustrated by Marta Monelli, is a charming story about a family's celebration of Sukkot. The mysterious disappearance of the gourds will capture the imagination of Pre-K through early Elementary School children and offer a teaching moment to educate all children about the Jewish holiday of Sukkot (Sukkos in the Ashkenazi tradition). The colors and illustrations are as charming as the story itself and will hold children's interest whether they are listening to a parent or teacher reading it, or are able to read it for themselves. Daycares and elementary schools will find this book a great tool for introducing a discussion of the customs and meaning of the holiday for both Jewish religious schools and multicultural education in other parochial and public schools. I worked entering children's books on the computer for a regional branch of the Philadelphia Free Library for 3 Â years, so have seen hundreds of children's books. Whatever you do, don't miss this little gem!! This is the first of what we hope will be many books from Susan Axe-Bronk.D. Yurchisin

There aren't too many Sukkot books around, so I was happy to find this one, a charming story about

mysteriously vanishing Sukkot decorations. Even though it's long past Sukkot, my 3-year-old daughter has been asking for this book ("the Gourds book") consistently for weeks. It has even replaced Mo Willem's Elephant & Piggie books as her primary bedtime choice. Highly recommended.

This gorgeously illustrated book charmed my kids during Sukkot and beyond. The intriguing tale kept us all guessing up to the end. I love the theme of giving thanks for the harvest's bounty, and teaching compassion to all living things - people and animals. It helped my kids to appreciate the spirit of Sukkot, and the cycles of nature.

My pre-K students at a nature sanctuary were fortunate to have *The Vanishing Gourds* read to them by the author Susan Axe-Bronk. This book was a good fit for our fall/winter curriculum as we learned about plants, animals, people, and their relationships. On the surface this story is about a little girl's preparations for the Jewish holiday of Sukkot. However, it has several other elements: the mystery of the disappearing gourds, the adventure of sleeping and dreaming outside, and the development of the little girl's compassion for hungry creatures. The underlying theme of the story is the cycle of nature, the cycle of life: seed to plant to seed, Sukkot to Sukkot, autumn to autumn. The illustrations by Marta Monelli are boldly colored and engaging. The main character, Sara, always appears in bright red boots. *The Vanishing Gourds* was an entertaining and educating choice for a circle time book for my pre-K nature class.

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